

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9174
INFO AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
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AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 20351

FROM VATICAN OFFICE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, VT
SUBJECT: VATICAN OSTPOLITIK: NEW STEPS IN PROGRESS

1. SUMMARY: IN EFFORT TO ADVANCE THE OBJECTIVES OF ITS OSTPOLITIK, THE VATICAN IS SPEEDING UP ITS CONTACTS WITH EAST EUROPEAN REGIMES. VATICAN DIPLOMATS WILL UNDERTAKE TRIPS TO HUNGARY AND ROMANIA THIS MONTH AND POSSIBLY TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA IN EARLY JANUARY, 1978. THESE STEPS FOLLOW ON THE HEELS OF THE VISIT OF POLISH COMMUNIST CHIEF GIEREK TO THE POPE ON DECEMBER 1 AND SIGNIFY A VATICAN INTEREST IN TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE VISIT'S WARM ATMOSPHERE AND OF THE POSITIVE SIGNALS THE VATICAN HAS BEEN RECEIVING FROM EAST EUROPEAN REGIMES IN THE CSCE CONTEXT. IT WOULD SEEM THAT THE VATICAN WOULD LIKE TO HAVE THESE REGIMES ENGAGED IN NEGOTIATIONS PRIOR TO THE END OF THE BELGRADE CONFERENCE. END SUMMARY.

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2. THE FIRST TRIP IS TO HUNGARY. A VATICAN DELEGATION, HEADED BY MONSIGNOR LUIGI POGGI, THE NUNCIO-AT-LARGE FOR CONTACTS WITH EAST EUROPE, DEPARTED ROME ON FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9, FOR BUDAPEST. ALTHOUGH THERE IS SPECULATION IN THE ITALIAN PRESS THAT THE PURPOSE OF THE VISIT IS TO OPEN UP DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS, A RELIABLE VATICAN OFFICIAL TOLD US THAT THIS IS NOT

THE CASE AND THAT THE PURPOSE OF THE VISIT IS TO OBTAIN AGREEMENT FROM THE HUNGARIAN GOVERNMENT FOR THE NOMINATION OF TWO NEW AUXILIARY BISHOPS AND THE TRANSFER OF TWO BISHOPS WITHIN HUNGARY.

3. THE SECOND TRIP IS PLANNED FOR ROMANIA. A VATICAN OFFICIAL WILL GO TO BUCHAREST ON DECEMBER 15 IN ORDER TO PROVIDE CATHOLIC BISHOPS A VATICAN DRAFT OF A JURIDICAL STATUTO FOR THEIR APPROVAL PRIOR TO ITS PRESENTATION TO THE GOVERNMENT OF ROMANIA (GOR). HE WILL ALSO HOLD PREIMINARY TALKS ON THE STATUTO WITH THE GOR'S HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CULTS. THE VATICAN BELIEVES THAT ONCE THE STATUTO IS ACCEPTED BY THE GOVERNMENT, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN ROMANIA WILL REGAIN THE LEGAL STATUS WHICH IT LOST FOLLOWING THE COMMUNIST ASSUMPTION OF POWER IN ROMANIA. THE PRINCIPAL DIFFICULTY IT FORESEES IS THE WORDING TO BE USED WITH REGARD TO THE UNIATE CHURCH. THE VATICAN HAS ACCEPTED IN PRINCIPLE DEFERRAL OF DISCUSSIONS REGARDING THE ULTIMATE FATE OF THE UNIATE CHURCH, WHICH WAS DISSOLVED AFTER THE WAR AND MERGED WITH THE ORTHODOX CHURCH, BUT IT WISHES TO INCLUDE IN THE STATUTO A REFERENCE WHICH INDICATES THAT THE QUESTION IS OPEN TO FUTURE NEGOTIATIONS.

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4. A THIRD TRIP IS PLANNED FOR PRAGUE FOR THE FIRST PART OF JANUARY, 1978, IN ORDER TO RESUME NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE CZECHOSLOVAK GOVERNMENT (GOC). THE GOC HAS BEEN SIGNALING TO THE VATICAN ITS DESIRE TO PROCEED WITH FREQUENT NEGOTIATIONS AND TO RESOLVE ON A STEP-BY-STEP BASIS OUTSTANDING PROBLEMS. IN VATICAN VIEW, THE GOC FEELS THE PRESSURE TO EMULATE THE RECENT IMPROVEMENT IN VATICAN RELATIONS WITH HUNGARY AND POLAND (SYMBOLIZED BY VISITS TO THE POPE BY KADAR JUNE 9 AND GIEREK DECEMBER 1).GARDNER

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